

# Department of Justice

## High-Risk Metropolitan Area Interoperability Assistance Project

### *Houston, Texas*



### Addressing Interoperability

The Department of Justice (DOJ) Wireless Management Office (WMO) is working to improve long-term federal interagency communications across the Nation. As an interim step, and as a response to a request from the House/Senate CJS Appropriations Subcommittee staff, the DOJ WMO has been leading the High-Risk Metropolitan Area Interoperability Assistance Project (“25 Cities”) to provide targeted cities with basic and immediate interagency communications capabilities among local, state, and federal agencies during emergency response. Twenty-five cities were selected using criteria that included perceived risk and population size. As stakeholders in 1 of the 25 cities, Houston metropolitan area, local, state, and federal public safety agencies have been working collaboratively with the DOJ WMO to address basic interoperable communications.

### Participating Agencies

Partnership among Houston area local, state, and federal public safety agencies has been instrumental in the development of comprehensive interoperability solution sets. Participating agencies have included—

- Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF)
- City of Houston
- Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
- Harris County
- Houston Airport Authority
- Port of Houston Authority
- Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS)
- U.S. Coast Guard
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)
- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)
- U.S. Marshals Service
- U.S. Secret Service (USSS)

### Key Successes

DOJ and area stakeholders will successfully achieve basic interoperability and emergency response communications improvements in the Houston metropolitan area through the implementation of one primary interoperability solution. The solution introduces new wide-area interoperability resources and also supports the use of existing, disparate communications systems. The new interoperability resources leverage these existing systems to extend coverage, capacity, and availability to more metropolitan area public safety agencies. Additionally, in the course of meeting this project’s interoperability goals, stakeholders were able to foster a working relationship between federal agencies and local and state agencies to resolve interoperability objectives for the area.

Two interoperability channels were implemented to support interagency communications during an emergency response. DOJ installed two 350-watt conventional narrowband very high frequency (VHF) repeaters in downtown Houston. These repeaters, along with four voted receivers, provide reliable, on-street, portable coverage of the interoperability channels throughout the metropolitan area. Hosted and maintained by the FBI, the new interoperability channels provide a means for wide-area interagency communications where the capability did not exist previously.

To extend connectivity to the new interoperability channels and existing VHF statewide mutual-aid channels, DOJ installed control stations at selected dispatch centers throughout the metropolitan area. Control stations were provided to ATF, DEA, Harris County Sheriff’s Office, Texas DPS, ICE, Port of Houston Authority, and USSS to link disparate or out-of-band radio systems to the interoperability channels. DOJ also provided direct console connectivity between the City of Houston and the FBI to enable the City patching capabilities of the interoperability channels. These control stations and console connectivity enable local, state, and federal agencies operating on disparate radio systems to communicate while using their own agency’s radio system.

To coordinate common operating procedures for the new interoperability solution, DOJ is working with local, state, and federal agencies. This collaborative effort will result in the development of a draft operations guidance document to address rules of use for operating on the interoperability channels. Stakeholders will continue to meet to review procedures and to discuss interoperability efforts in the Houston metropolitan area.

### Moving Forward

The cooperation and support between participating agencies and DOJ WMO provided scalable solutions designed to give additional agencies future access to the interoperability solutions. Sustained operations, maintenance, and support of these interoperability solutions will be coordinated by key stakeholders. These efforts, along with the City of Houston’s short-term interoperability plans to link disparate networks and interoperate on existing systems, and the regional area’s long-term plans for migration to a regional system, will ensure continuity in addressing interoperable communications among public safety agencies in the Houston metropolitan area.

### Contact Information

If you would like to know more about this initiative and the interoperability solutions, please contact—

#### Interoperability Channels

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